	Western Carolina University Police Department	G.O. 302
	General Orders	License Plate Recognition / License Plate Reader (LPR)
	Effective Date: June 5, 2025	Page: 1 of 5
	Approved By: Chief Steven D. Lillard Chief of Police	Signature:

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide officers with guidelines on the proper use of license plate recognition (LPR) systems, also commonly known as license plate reader systems.

II. POLICY

The availability and use of LPR systems have provided many opportunities for the enhancement of productivity, effectiveness, and officer safety. It is the policy of this agency that all members abide by the guidelines set forth herein when using LPR systems.

III. DEFINITIONS:

A. **FOUO**: For Official Use Only

B. **LPR**: License Plate Recognition/License Plate Reader

C. **OCR**: Optical Character Recognition (Digital images of license plates and vehicles and associated metadata (e.g., date, time, and geographic coordinates associated with the vehicle image capture) that are captured by the LPR system.

D. **Alert**: A visual and/or auditory notice that is triggered when the LPR system receives a potential “hit” on a license plate.

E. **Hit**: A read matched to a plate that has previously been registered on an agency’s “hot list” of vehicle plates related to stolen vehicles, wanted vehicles, or other factors supporting investigation, or which has been manually registered by a user for further investigation.

F. **Hot list**: License plate numbers of stolen cars, vehicles owned by persons of interest, and vehicles associated with AMBER Alerts that are regularly added to “hot lists” circulated among law enforcement agencies. Hot list information can come from a variety of sources, including stolen vehicle information from the National Insurance Crime Bureau and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), as well as national AMBER Alerts and Department of Homeland Security watch lists. Departments of motor vehicles can provide lists of expired registration tags, and law enforcement agencies can interface their own, locally compiled hot lists to the LPR system. These lists serve an officer safety function as well as an investigatory purpose. In addition to agency supported hot lists, users may also manually add license plate numbers to hot lists in order to be alerted if and when a vehicle license plate of interest is “read” by the LPR system.

G. **Fixed LPR system**: LPR cameras that are permanently affixed to a structure, such as a pole, a traffic barrier, or a bridge.

H. **Mobile LPR system**: LPR cameras that are affixed, either permanently (hardwired) or temporarily (e.g., magnet-mounted), to a law enforcement vehicle for mobile deployment.

I. **Portable LPR system**: LPR cameras that are transportable and can be moved and deployed in a variety of venues as needed, such as a traffic barrel or speed radar sign.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. General

1. The use of LPR systems is restricted to public safety–related missions of this agency.

2. LPR systems and associated equipment and databases are authorized for official public safety purposes. Misuse of this equipment and associated databases, or data, may be subject to sanctions and/or disciplinary actions.

3. LPR systems and LPR data and associated media are the property of this agency and intended for use in conducting official business with limited exceptions noted elsewhere in this policy.

B. Administration

1. The agency shall designate an employee(s) with administrative oversight for LPR system deployment and operations who is (are) responsible for the following:

   a. Establishing protocols for access, collection, storage, and retention of LPR data and associated media files

   b. Establishing protocols to preserve and document LPR reads and “alerts” or “hits” that are acted on in the field or associated with investigations or prosecutions

   c. Establishing protocols to establish and ensure the security and integrity of data captured, stored, and/or retained by the LPR system

d. Ensuring the proper selection of the personnel approved to operate the LPR system and maintaining an adequate number of trainees;

e. Maintaining records identifying approved LPR deployments and documenting their results, including appropriate documentation of significant incidents and arrests that are related to LPR usage

f. Authorizing any requests for LPR systems use or data access according to the policies and guidelines of this agency

2. Designated, trained personnel shall check equipment on a regular basis to ensure functionality and camera alignment. Any equipment that falls outside expected functionality shall be removed from service until deficiencies have been corrected.

3. LPR systems repairs, hardware or software, shall be made by agency authorized sources.

C. License Plate Reader System Usage

1. LPR operation and access to LPR collected data shall be for official agency purposes only.

2. Only officers who have been properly trained in the use and operational protocols of the LPR systems shall be permitted to use it.

3. When practical, at the start of each shift, users must ensure that the LPR system has been updated with the most current hot lists available (if applicable).

4. LPR Alerts/Hits: Prior to initiation of the stop:

a. Visually verify that the vehicle plate number matches the plate number run by the LPR system, including both alphanumeric characters of the license plate and the state of issuance.

b. Verify the current status of the plate through dispatch or MDT query when circumstances allow.

5. In each case in which an alert or a hit is triggered, the user should record the disposition of the alert and the hit into the LPR system

6. Hot lists may be updated manually if the user enters a specific plate into the LPR system and wants to be alerted when that plate is located. Whenever a plate is manually entered into the LPR system, the officer should document the reason.

7. Special Details: LPR use during nontraditional deployments (e.g., special operations or during a criminal investigation) must be approved by the administrator.

8. Searches of historical data within the LPR system should be done in accordance with established departmental policies and procedures.

D. LPR Data Sharing and Dissemination

LPR data should be considered FOUO and can be shared for legitimate law enforcement purposes:

1. When LPR data are disseminated outside the agency, it should be documented in a secondary dissemination log.

2. Information sharing among agencies should be dictated in accordance with MOUs (memoranda of understanding) or established departmental policies.

V. Retention (In accordance with NCGS 20-183.32)

A. Captured plate data obtained by an automatic license plate reader system, operated by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency for law enforcement purposes, shall not be preserved for more than 90 days after the date the data is captured.

B. Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, data obtained by an automatic license plate reader may be preserved for more than 90 days pursuant to any of the following:

1. A preservation request under subsection (c) of this section.

2. A search warrant issued pursuant to Article 11 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes.

3. A federal search warrant issued in compliance with the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure.

C. Upon the request of a law enforcement agency, the custodian of the captured plate data shall take all necessary steps to immediately preserve captured plate data in its

possession. A requesting agency must specify in a written, sworn statement all of the following:

1. The location of the particular camera or cameras for which captured plate data must be preserved and the particular license plate for which captured plate data must be preserved.

2. The date or dates and time frames for which captured plate data must be preserved.

3. Specific and articulable facts showing that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the captured plate data is relevant and material to an ongoing criminal or missing persons investigation or is needed to prove a violation of a motor carrier safety regulation.

4. The case and identity of the parties involved in that case.

After one year from the date of the initial preservation request, the captured plate data obtained by an automatic license plate reader system shall be destroyed according to the custodian's own record or data retention policy, unless the custodian receives within that period another preservation request under this subsection, in which case the retention period established under this subsection shall reset.

D. A law enforcement agency that uses an automatic license plate reader system in accordance with G.S. 20-183.31 shall update the system from the databases specified therein every 24 hours if such updates are available or as soon as practicable after such updates become available.

E. Captured plate data obtained in accordance with this Article is confidential and not a public record as that term is defined in G.S. 132-1. Data shall not be disclosed except to a criminal justice officer at a State or local law enforcement agency or a similar official at a federal law enforcement agency for a legitimate law enforcement purpose pursuant to a written request from the requesting agency. Written requests may be in electronic format. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed as requiring the disclosure of captured plate data if a law enforcement agency determines that disclosure will compromise an ongoing investigation. Captured plate data shall not be sold for any purpose. (2015-190, s. 1; 2023-151, s. 5(f).)

V. REFERENCES

NCGS 20-183: Article 3D. Automatic License Plate Reader Systems.